

## The Boom Times... 1930 - 1960

### 1930s

**Development of Suburbs:** *“The introduction of trams meant the city could explode outwards. Firstly horse-drawn then steam and finally the electric tram meant people could live in the suburbs and work in the city.*

*“The suburbs which had already begun to develop well before 1914 came into their own. With rising car-ownership, the construction of all-weather concrete or bitumen highways became a significant factor in suburban expansion. Associated with the residential growth were new suburban centres along the main roads.”* [Auckland Boom or Bust, Auckland Museum, 2000 p. 13]

**Bus Depot:** (2059 Great North Rd & 6 Wingate Street) In the 1930s, Wingate St stables was used as City Council bus depot and also (1930s-1940s) by Transport Bus Services. [M Butler report, Heritage Planning, Auckland City Council, 2001]

**Depression:** The depression meant the end for some businesses. The Amos' in the Pages Building kept going by missing only 1 week out of 5 for wages. They supplied groceries to work teams on the West Coast.

But from out of the Depression Years come stories of community goodwill. One case in point is that of Mrs Margaret Francis

Richardson (c.1882-1965), wife of former Avondale Borough Councillor Paul Richardson (c.1882-1961). It came to her notice that some of the children attending Avondale Primary School were going to school without any lunch to eat. So, Mrs Richardson went around the local businesses, asking for donations of cocoa, sugar and milk, and then asked the School for the use of an old shed on site as a “cocoa shed”. From there, she set up to provide cocoa drinks for the children, those who could afford it paying 1d a week, while those who couldn't received cocoa free.

**“The Cocoa Lady”** became a feature of many childhood memories of the period. According to her daughters, Mrs Lorna Gagen and Mrs Shirley Fleming, Mrs Richardson was known for helping those boys a little late returning to class by hiding them under a shelf in the shed when their teacher came looking for them, then when the coast was clear saying to the boy “All right, go for your life!”

Her daughters told me that a man from Onehunga had written praising their mother, saying he was sure she kept him alive during the Depression. I later sighted the card:

*Please accept my sincere sympathy in the sad loss of your mother. She was a wonderful lady. I can still recall drinking the hot mugs of cocoa she used to give me when I went to the Avondale school during the slump. A truly wonderful person.*

[Condolence card, by courtesy of the family of Mrs. Richardson]

Margaret Richardson (born in Glasgow, Scotland) was also a JP

in Avondale. [Conversation with Mrs Gagen and Mrs Fleming, 15 June 2001].

### 1930

**Avondale Picture Theatre:** Three years into the era of “talkies”, the Avondale Picture Theatre still had not made the change with the times – and the business suffered because of it.

*On February 20 1930 Mr Meikle wrote to the Town Clerk "asking for permission to again discontinue the Thursday night picture entertainment in the Avondale Town hall. The supply of silent films is running short, and until such time as I can dispose of my interest in the business I wish to conserve that supply as far as possible. Last Thursday night's gross receipts amounted to 17/-9d so no hardship will be entailed upon the residents of Avondale thereby. It will help me somewhat if you will entertain this request."*

*"I am finding it increasingly difficult to carry on at the Avondale Town Hall," Mr Meikle wrote on April 28 1930. "The very strong opposition presented by the Talking Pictures in the City and by the Western Springs Speedway has reduced my receipts to such an extent that there is hardly anything left after paying expenses ..."*

*"To install a talking outfit is too costly for me to undertake, and the wisdom of doing so would be very doubtful. New Lynn and Howick both crashed after "going talkie" and Papakura put his plant out after having it in a short while, finding it more profitable to run silent films. The chance of my*

*being able to sell out is very remote ...*

*"For some time I have been trying to sell my interest in the business, but without avail. I tried to sell to the man I brought from - H. Empson. He was interested and spent three days making enquiries re the altered conditions of the business generally and at the end of that time came to me and said he had decided not to buy. I asked him one third of the price I had paid him 2 and a half years ago. I endeavoured to get Mr Henry Hayward to install a talking plant on a profit sharing basis with the preponderance in his favour but he declined...."*

*"I am now working for the White Island Products Ltd at Tauranga and will find it very difficult to get to Auckland (in the event of wishing to have me appear) but my son who is running the business at Avondale will supply you with any information. I am afraid it is hopeless to try and sell with the rent as at present. [from Picture Theatres of Auckland, by Jan Grefstad]"*

The Town Clerk wrote back to Mr. Meikle on the 10th May 1930

*"It would appear that the management of the theatre can scarcely be classed satisfactory, in that you have left the control of the arrangements to your son who is a lad of 17 years of age and who can hardly be regarded as sufficiently responsible for the conduct of a business of this nature. I am given to understand also that there is not even a licensed operator in charge of the screening and as a consequence, exhibitions are not conducted in a satisfactory manner"*

*and in such a way that the patronage of the Avondale people is likely to be attracted or retained."*

[from *Picture Theatres of Auckland*, by Jan Grefstad]

Mr Meikle's reply, May 15 1930:

*"...you have been grossly and very probably maliciously misinformed. The falling off of the patronage at Avondale Town Hall is chiefly due to the advent of talking films. It has nothing to do with the management or control of the theatre which is just as good as it ever was. My son's age is 18 years and 9 months; and there is no such thing as a licensed operator in New Zealand. I have always bought the best films that were obtainable and I have steadfastly refused to screen anything questionable and this policy is still being adhered to. If I have to walk out I shall be the sole sufferer - the ratepayers would notice the difference. If I could get relief for a year, it would enable me to carry on until the business became more stable. The outlook is not at all bright."* [from *Picture Theatres of Auckland*, by Jan Grefstad]

On 13<sup>th</sup> June, Mr Meikle tried to sell the business back to Harry Empson. Empson asked the Council to do some repairs and furniture replacement. However by 24 June Mr Meikle was writing to the Council in desperation. Meikle's contract with Auckland City was terminated by 1 July, and taken over by Henry Hayward (of Fuller-Hayward distributors fame) on 15 August. By Christmas 1930, 'talkies' had finally come to Avondale. Mrs Hilda Hayward (then wife of Henry Hayward's nephew and film-maker Rudall Hayward) managed the theatre for Henry Hayward, and the Town Hall now

became Hayward's Picture House & Cabaret.

Henry Hayward was born in Scotland, coming to New Zealand in 1905, and ran travelling motion picture shows with accompanying music, starting in Dunedin. "Hayward's Enterprises" amalgamated with Fuller's to form "The Fuller-Hayward Corporation" after 1910, and it was this distribution-exhibition company which took over the lease on the Avondale Picture Theatre.

*(The following is information both from Mr Neill Boak, former son-in-law to Hilda and Rudall Hayward, and Mr Jan Grefstad)*

While Phillip, Henry Hayward's son (and Rudall's cousin) ran Auckland Cinemas Ltd, Rudall's brother Norman continued to work for Fullers, then joined Kerridge-Odeon when they took over the Fuller theatres in 1946.

Hilda Hayward (1898-1970) started managing the Avondale Picture Theatre during the depression (poss. when Auckland Cinemas was set up) and finished by the early 1950s. She would often give free passes to local identities. When Rudall left her for Ramai in the early 1940s, Hilda lost her heart in the business, and was "never the same" according to some who knew her.

She was very well known and popular in the area. Mr Boak recalled her "walking up and down Avondale streets after performances at night – she didn't have a car – heading on the way home to Blockhouse Bay Rd".

There were sessions every night, matinees on Saturdays. Hilda would stay there until everything

had been checked, very concerned about security, and especially so after the 1939 fire. Sometimes, she'd stay until 11.30 at night. Mrs Hayward apparently had a fear of fire, and the 1939 fire gave her quite a bad fright.

The Avondale Theatre sessions seemed at one point to run in conjunction with those at Pt Chevalier's cinema. By motor car Mr Boak would transport rolls of film from Avondale to Pt Chevalier when each session had finished. The same film and same reels used between the two cinemas. (According to Jan Grefstad, this would have been because for a few years in the late 1940s to early 1950s, Pt Chevalier Cinema had a film booking arrangement with Auckland Cinemas until Kerridge-Odeon purchased the cinema.)

**Morrison & Crawford:** (1851-1853 Great North Rd) After serving time with Northern Steamship Company, Scotsman J Crawford comes to Avondale and opens Crawford's Garage on Great North Road. This later becomes Morrison & Crawfords, then under Atlantic brand, and finally replaced by Mobil station by Battersby's when Mobil Oil bought out Atlantic.

Crawford went on to be a president of the Avondale Businessmen's Association, master of the Titirangi Masonic Lodge, and founding member of the Avondale Cricket Club, among other honours. He died in September 1966. [*Western Leader*, 27/9/66]

According to his widow, Mrs V. Crawford, he also held the Queens Coronation Medal.

Jim Crawford came into the business at the instigation of Jack Fearon (of Fearon Bros.) who owned all the land which is now occupied from the corner of the Fearon Block to Battersby's carpark. Mr Fearon introduced Mr Crawford to a Mr Morrison (hence the firm's name), and the partnership was arranged. Unfortunately, Mr Morrison left the partnership after around 6 months, and as it was the Depression at the time, Jim Crawford felt he couldn't afford the charges for changing the name solely to his own. By the time the Depression was over, the locals had become used to the name, and so he left it as it was.

According to Mrs Crawford, because Blockhouse Bay buses were irregular in the early days, those travelling elsewhere from the Bay would bike to Avondale, and park their bikes in the garage at Morrison & Crawford's, then take the tram or main road buses.

After Mr Crawford in 1966, Mrs Crawford managed the business for another ten years. [Conversation with Mrs V Crawford, 28 June 2001].

*"Owned and operated by the family of the late Jim Crawford (as Morrison and Crawford Ltd), from its beginnings as a multi-brand outlet in 1930 the station has, despite the effects of economic recessions, roading changes and rising fuel prices, maintained steady upward growth which reflects the vision and confidence of successive managements.*

*"Leaving an indelible imprint upon its history is Mrs Vera Crawford who took over the running of the business in 1957 when her*

*husband was forced to retire through ill health. Whilst we now see women taking an increasing part in the management of New Zealand service stations, she surely was a pioneer in this area. And why did she take on this challenge? 'Because people told me that (as a woman) I couldn't do it,' says Mrs Crawford.*" [Mobil Happenings, in-house magazine, 1982, from the Crawford Collection, courtesy of Mrs V. Crawford]

## 1931

**Whau Bridge:** Whau bridge upgraded for heavy traffic. Until now, only a one-way, wooden structure.

*"The temporary scoria surface was a test of skill for motorbike riders, three of whom skidded in gravelly crashes in the first week the bridge was open."* [Peter Buffett, *Western Leader*, 26/9/85]

**Steam Buses:** In 1931, A and G Price Limited of Thames built an experimental Doble steam bus for the Auckland Transport Board. *"The flexible steam unit provided a range of speeds from a mere crawl to 60 or more miles an hour by the simple process of admitting more steam to the engine. A report in the New Zealand Herald of the time said: 'The bus sped along the road to Point Chevalier at fifty miles an hour, reckless of speed limits, and moved off from a standstill on a steep slope silently and smoothly.' But the impressive performance on the trial did not last."* [Graham Stewart, *The End of the Penny Section*, 1973] The engine's tubing failed in the heat, and performance was too drastically reduced at cooler temperatures. The buses were never used for public transport.

The trial bus may have sparked the memory of the Avondale resident quoted in *Challenge of the Whau*: *"One of the earliest (motor buses) was a steam bus. One resident recalls that its great bursts of steam outside the Avondale Hotel caused horses tied to the adjacent hitching rail to panic."*

However, some who used to reside in Rosebank tell how the steam buses made it down to Avondale Road, serving the area. This is still a continuing mystery.

The **hitching rail** was removed in the 1940s by Mr A Bailey, owner of Avoncourt Hotel.

### **Funeral Directors in Avondale: Before Battersby.**

The history of undertakers as a profession stems from the nineteenth century in its modern form, with the various trades involved in the tasks of conveying the dead to their final rest (cabinetmakers to make the coffins, or liverymen to take the bodies to the cemeteries.)

*"The cabinetmaker rarely became involved in any aspect of the funeral other than providing the coffin. Even the conveyance of the deceased was done by someone else, the livery man."*

*With the passing of time, these men became more and more involved in providing other services and advice to those planning the funeral.*

*Eventually the person who would "undertake" to manage all funeral details and provide funeral merchandise became known as an*

*"undertaker." He eventually obtained and provided all the necessary items for the funeral including the hearse, door badges, coffin rests, etc. (In the English language, this meaning for "undertaker" appeared before the end of the 1700s).*

*Once it became possible for the undertaker to provide embalming services, the haste was taken out of the burial process and people were given ample time to arrange and prepare for the funeral. "* [from [http://wyfda.org/basics\\_3.html](http://wyfda.org/basics_3.html), webpage on 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in American funeral practices, sighted 2001]

*"Richard Metcalf and Peter Huntington have stated that "In colonial times, the undertaker was a part-time specialist only; his main skills were those of the carpenter," and Judith Newman has said simply "Undertakers originally were carpenters who built coffins on the side."*

[David Burrell, from his website on American history of funeral directors, <http://dave.burrell.net/OofUnder.html>, sighted 2001]

From around 1901, Avondale relied on T James Mclvor & Sons when they needed a funeral director and embalmer – but the Mclvors' business was on Karangahape Road in Newton, five to six miles away (although Mclvor did live in Pt Chevalier). [information from J Battersby conversation, 4/5/01; advertisement in *The News*, 27/2/1915]

By 1911, a Michael McCarthy lived on Station Road, approximately one house north of Walton St (later Walsall). He was a "currier" by trade, or a carrier.[*Wises Directory*, 1911], as well as being a fisherman, selling his wares fresh to the locals. From about 1915 onwards, he

operated a taxi and launch hire business [*Challenge of the Whau*], and by November 1922 [News advertisement] he considered himself a "Funeral Furnisher". But this was definitely a sideline to his vehicle hire and carrying business; he had "7-seater taxis, a wedding car, a charabanc and a motor launch." [*Challenge of the Whau*, p.72]. As a "livery man", McCarthy would have filled the need of transporting the deceased either "down the Lane" to Rosebank Cemetery, or even further afield to Waikumete. He probably arranged for the coffins to be made by local cabinetmakers or carpenters.

**Battersby Ltd:** Battersby funeral director established his business in 1931, alongside what is now Avondale Auction House [*Western Leader* ad, 25/11/71]

William Richard (Bill) Battersby was born in 1906 in Kingsland. He founded the 3-generation family business of Battersbys after marrying his wife Nancy on 6 August 1930, and immediately moving to 1495 Great North Road, Waterview. Bill Battersby had one son, Phillip, who in turn had two sons, Richard and Mark. In 1960, when Bill retired, his son Phillip took over the business, having worked for his father in the trade much of his life. In 1982, Richard left the business, and in 1986 Mark took over the management, buying the business outright from his father by 1989.

Bill Battersby was, initially by profession, a cabinetmaker, with speciality in French Polishing. This involved applying shellac dissolved in methylated spirits to the wood with either a "rubber" (usually now

upholsters wadding or cotton wool in a square of white unbleached cotton) or with a squirrel hair brush. French polishing was and is a highly-prized skill, taking years to perfect, because it adds the highest shine to wood, from mahogany to pine. There are different 'colours' of polish, from butter (yellowish) to garnet (brown) to orange (gold-brown) to white/transparent which are clear. Mr Battersby was often seen outside his premises at 1990 Great North Road up to 1937, "rubbing his hands together", which could have taken some residents of the time aback, given his profession as funeral director. But the hand-rubbing came from the residue of the polishes and solvents he would have used from the polishing. Nevertheless, there are people who still claim that he "measured people up and down" as they passed by his business.

"The first hearse used by W.R. Battersby's Ltd was a converted Buick service car from the Auckland to Waihi run" [*Western Leader*, 25/11/71]

Bill Battersby was also during his time a treasurer and member of the Avondale Businessmen's Association, member of the committee of the Auckland Orphans Club, president of Orewa Orphans Club (which he founded) and a member of the executive of Teleflower, Inc., not to mention a keen sea fisherman. All told, at the time of his death, reported in the *Avondale Advance* of 18/6/62, he had two children, and six grandchildren.

Part of Avondale lore had it that three ghosts inhabited the brick building that once was at 1990

Great North Road. Jennifer Battersby, granddaughter-in-law to Bill Battersby and wife of the current proprietor Mark Battersby, told me the story of the ghosts predated the funeral director business there. As the spirits hadn't apparently bothered the staff at the Post Office there now – perhaps the spirits left with the old building's demolition.

The **Avondale Library** was opened (again) on 27 June 1931, in the old Public Hall. It was always considered to be a temporary location, but lasted 42 years.

*"In the 1930s it was well enough located, close to the post office (Avondale Hotel building) and surrounded by a few small shops. By the end of the 1940s it was beginning to be out on a limb. The trams to town now ran from the corner of Rosebank Road and Great North Road, a kilometre or so to the north, where the building of new shops, banks and a post office left the library with a cinema as its only neighbour of substance."*  
[A Brief History of Avondale Library, compiled 1989, Avondale Community Library; *Bookmarks, a history of Avondale's Libraries 1867-1973*, L. J. Truttman, 2001.]

**Hayward's Picture Theatre** celebrated their 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary on August 15, 1931.

*To help the locals celebrate their first anniversary on August 15 1931 they showed Norma Shearer and Marie Dressler in "LET US BE GAY". This was a glorious talkie special. A wild night on the dance floor when the Hayward's made whoopee! There would be a battle of snowballs, streamers, confetti and with Ken Gillam's Wonder*

*band on the dance floor the locals would help them celebrate this remarkable event ... In the fortnightly calendar distributed around the district it was said that it was one year since the Hayward's came to Avondale. Opposition shows prophesied they would not last three months! "Forgive us for crowing but our clearer sound and better programmes are still confounding the prophets." Hayward's Town Hall Avondale was the "Rendezvous of the Western Suburbs .Gayest and Smartest" ... Special concession to New Lynn and Glen Eden Patrons if they presented their bus ticket when buying a movie ticket when a concession of 6d applied to circle seats. They could even take a Free Taxi Service from the New Lynn Post Office on Saturday nights only. [Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]*

## 1932

**Trams to Avondale:** After the years of slow development in public transport under the Auckland City Council, in 1929 all services were passed to the jurisdiction and authority of the Auckland Transport Board (which later became part of the Auckland Regional Authority). Under Chairman J.A.C. Allum, extensions further into Mt Albert and finally Avondale were completed.

The tram service to Avondale was inaugurated Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February 1932 [*NZ Herald*]. According to the *Avondale Primary School Centennial Booklet*, 1970, the children on the day the trams came to Avondale were given free rides for the day. Graham Stewart, in his book *The End of The Penny*

*Section* (1993), said that the first tram through to Avondale was No. 246, although he showed a photo with a Mt Albert destination, stated January instead of February, and wrongly had the terminus as at the Great North Road/Rosebank road junction. The terminus was actually further up the hill.

Robbie Robinson, of Dennis Carews, recalled the day the tram came off the tracks, and didn't stop at the terminus halfway up upper Rosebank Road. It kept on going, finally coming to a standstill across the intersection with Great North Rd. After this, they dug holes in Rosebank Road, and put wooden boards across the top, so if the tram came off the tracks again, its weight would smash the wood and send the front down the holes. [*Conversation with Mr Robinson, 7/3/2001*]

*"It crossed Great North Road, carving grooves in the concrete as it went. 'My sister said she was there. She said that it lurched from side to side. She thought that it was going to roll over.'"* [M Abercrombie, interview, Avondale Oral History Project, 1990-1991; *Challenge of the Whau*, p. 72]

Trams coming down to Rosebank Road in the 1930s rather than St Judes effectively sealed Avondale's fate to that of a township in two parts. Rosebank Road was made easier for tram access by the 1915 railway bridge linking (then) Station Road and Manukau Road, both now joined as Blockhouse Bay Rd.

On Sundays, there used to be a "Sunday Family Special Fare" on the trams – 1/6 to go anywhere, for husband, wife, plus 3-4 children. [*Conversation with Mr & Mrs Browne, 9 May 2001*]



It is a common belief that former Avondale Mayor John Tait was behind the choice of tramline coming via Blockhouse Bay Road and down Rosebank, rather than via St Judes St. He had, after all, a business just up from where he later that year developed the Unity Buildings. But, the 1915 Railway Bridge was the main reason behind the route as it was and still is, even with diesel-engine buses today. St Judes Street is forever hampered by the railway crossing.

The coming of the trams was not good news for all businesses. Those at the other end of Avondale felt increasingly isolated. And Hayward's Theatre was not the exception.

*"During the earlier part of my tenancy business was profitable particularly during the Summer months but with the advent of the Tramway extension with its increased facilities for visiting the theatres in and nearer the city business has fallen off badly. Generally depressed conditions and a large amount of poverty in the district have also been contributing factors...."*

*...we ask you to keep in mind the possibility, however remote, of a **new theatre** being built on the vacant section at the corner of Gt. North Road and Rosebank Road near the Tram Terminus. At various times attempts have been made by local businessmen to raise capital for this purpose. Now that one floor theatres are being built and equipped for five thousand pounds and the restrictions against building picture theatres have been removed by the recent test case at Rotorua there is always the*

*possibility of some misguided individuals putting up the money.*

*As the promoters of this scheme have claimed the Town Hall is out of the business centre of the town but they must not be given the opportunity to suggest that it is uncomfortable or out of date as a new theatre in this district would be a disaster to both parties."* [A letter to the Town Clerk by Henry Hayward, July 9 1933, taken from *Picture Theatres of Auckland*, by Jan Grefstad]

It is possible Hayward was referring to the site later chosen as that for the **new Post Office**, built 1938.

Fuller-Haywards did not do well in the Depression. When the corporation was taken over by debenture holders, Henry Hayward split from the company to form Auckland Cinemas Ltd. It was this company which held the lease on the Avondale Picture Theatre from the Depression up until 1966.

**Unity Buildings:** *"The shops on the south-east side of the Rosebank Road/Great North Road intersection ... built when trams came to the area. Mr Tait, who was the developer, invited school children to submit names for the block. The winning suggestion was 'Unity Buildings'. The name can still be seen on the concrete façade."* [Challenge of the Whau, p. 91]

*"The Unity Building (corner) was named by a competition for school children and won I think by Laurie Porritt, [who was] later killed in action in the Air Force, WW2."* [Letter by Mr I J Whyte to author, 17/4/2001]

First reference to Unity Buildings is Auckland Directory of 1932/33.

**Subscription Libraries:** “The fancy goods shop and library in the Unity Building, Avondale, **F W Clement**, proprietor, is filling a long-last want. A good range to choose from.” [The News, 3/11/32]

Despite the opening of the Auckland Council-run Library in the Public Hall in 1931, the businesses on the other side of Avondale still ran their own libraries. The last was **Eve’s Bookshop** in the Rosebank Buildings (now Rosebank Takeaways), who maintained a library in the rear of the shop until around 1979. The proprietors would often tell me that the opening of the new Avondale Library just opposite their shop (1972) killed their library business. While the library was way on the other side of town, they did well. The books were mainly fiction, of the kind these days you see on sale for \$1 in fleamarkets, garage sales, and the local op-shop. I recall seeing another shop library in Waterview in 1981, but it was gone soon after. The niche was taken over by book exchanges. [Bookmarks, by the author, 2001]

New Years Eve, 1932, at **Hayward’s Picture Theatre:**

For two years in succession Hayward’s New Year’s Eve Celebrations were the most original and enjoyable in New Zealand. Its fame has spread far and wide. Don’t miss this year’s De Luxe Fun Unlimited. A Battle of Snowballs, blindfold hurdle race, Chocolate Wheel, hats, streamers, confetti and balloons. Follow the crowd to the BIG SHOW for a great night’s fun. Pictures and dance 2/- Dance only 1/6 Spectators 6d. [Jan Grefstad, Picture Theatres of Auckland]

**Graffiti:** First instance found of problems with graffiti comes from a 1932 Avondale Primary School Committee meeting, where “the Headmaster regretted having to report acts of mischief and writing about the buildings. He suggested that the damage be repaired and the Secretary was instructed to write to the local police asking for more supervision.” [Ron Oates, Avondale Primary School, 1870-1990, 1990]

## 1933

**Watson’s chemist** opens in Fearon Block (next to present-day Battersby’s. [Western Leader, 17/5/83]

**Battersby** now moves to upper Rosebank Road.(beside Methodist Union church). [Western Leader, 25/11/71]

**Bus Companies:** “The bus company (before 1933) was the T.B.S. (Transport Bus Service) – the depot was in Avondale. Mr McCrae started the A.B.C. (Auckland Bus Company) New Lynn, in 1933 [these served Avondale as well, along Great North Road to the city]. Some of the buses were old rattletraps, often breaking down. You never knew whether they would turn up on time or come at all. One day we were chugging slowly up Atkinson Rd [Titirangi] and a boy passed us on a bicycle. Everyone just fell off their seats laughing.

“Commercial Buses took over after Mr McCrae’s death; it was a treat to have buses that didn’t leak when it rained. All the windows opened and closed properly, and the buses were on time. Unfortunately,

*Commercial Buses had to give up part of their run and now we have the Yellow Bus Company buses”* [Memories of Early Titirangi, by Alwynne Broady, published in West Auckland Remembers, Vol. 2, West Auckland Historical Society, 1992].

## 1935

In 1935, the **Avondale Presbyterian Church** celebrated 75 years since the construction of the little white church in 1860, and published a slim booklet to commemorate the occasion. The booklet included a good description of St Ninians Church as it was in its heyday.

### *“The Building:*

*Standing originally as the only public building in a wide area, from Kingsland to the Waitakeres, the Avondale Church is now, after 75 years, still a prominent feature on Great North Road, though surrounded by the more recent erections of a flourishing generation, its sole adornment a quaint bell-tower, and its windows designed by those who scorned the Gothic, yet achieving a proportion sometimes missed in more pretentious structures.*

*Internally there is a Scottish look about the heavy pews, and little of ornament save a moulded arch behind the pulpit. It is later history which occasioned the handsome Roll of Honour, carrying a goodly array of names under the all too memorable figures “1914-1918”, that hangs conspicuously on the wall.*

*The bell hangs silent, for its iron fittings have not escaped the corruption of rust. It is, however, a*

*tribute to the hands that reared it that after so long the building stands without serious deterioration. The original shingles have been replaced by corrugated iron, perhaps at some loss of appearance. A glance beneath shows that the building rests, unmoved by wind, and maintaining its level, upon large blocks of scoria.*

*The vestry is an addition made about 46 years ago. Except that the lighting has kept pace with modern improvements, there is nothing to render the church strange to those who knew it in the past. Some such will remember the building, not only as standing for worship, but also to learning. For it housed the ‘**Village School**’ for a period, and for longer the more or less level ground about it was the ‘playground’ of the school across the road.* [Avondale Presbyterian Church, anniversary booklet, 1860-1935, held in Pamphlet collection, Auckland War Memorial Museum Library.]

## Late 1930s

During the late 1930s, the Gibson bakery (Great North Rd/Rosebank Road NW corner) was owned by the Burton family and operated as a branch of their city business. It closed shortly after World War II. [Challenge of the Whau, p. 88]

From late 1930's to 1969, Fearon's Store on the corner of Great North Rd and Rosebank Road was used as a **Farmers Trading store branch** (Farmer's Cash and Carry).

## 1937

In 1937, **Battersby's Ltd** moved to Rosebank Road.

According to Mrs Lorna Gagen, Mr Battersby ran a taxi service as well, during and just after the war. There were also two bridal cars – both black, decorated with white ribbons.

By now, possibly due to an increase in calling for his services, Mr Battersby had coffins made by a Mr Kircher from Waterview. “His wife” Mrs Gagen told me, “worked like a Trojan.” Mrs Gagen used one of the Battersby bridal cars when she was married. [Conversation with Mrs Lorna Gagen, 15 June 2001].

On 11 November, the first recorded meeting of the **Avondale Businessmen’s Association** took place.

*In the early 1930s, there was some concern over apparent lack of action by the Auckland City Council with regard to facility provision in the Avondale district (which had amalgamated with the City in 1927).*

*It is likely that an Avondale Businessmen’s Association was in existence prior to late 1937, but to date no records prior to 11 November 1937 have been found.*

*On 11 November 1937, a meeting of the Avondale Businessmen’s Association gave consent to be incorporated with the resolution*

*That the businessmen of Avondale form an incorporated association for the purpose of installing a community system of electric lighting of shops to be called ‘The Avondale Businessmen’s Association Incorporated.’*

On 7 June 1939, the Association was incorporated as a legal body. The first President of the Association was **William John Tait**, a former Mayor of Avondale, and landowner as well as Land Agent for much of the block between Great North Road and Layard Street that was not occupied by the school or the Salvation Army.

[Towards a Bright Future, The History of the Avondale Business Association, Lisa. J. Truttman, 2001.]

## 1938

19 August 1938: The **new Post Office** opens, built by J A Penman & Sons for £4295 plus £112 for the tiled roof.

In a letter to the Chief Postmaster dated 14 July 1938, the Avondale Postmaster wrote: “It was decided to request the Department to provide sufficient bunting to dress both frontages of the new building and also, if possible, to have flags suspended across the Great North Road between the office and Fearon’s Buildings and across the Rosebank Road to the Self-Help corner. Permission to make use of Power-board poles erected in the vicinity can probably be obtained. If strings of coloured lights could be run along the top of the new building this would look very effective when lit up in the evening of the opening day and possibly the following night.” [Mike Butler report, Heritage Planning, Auckland City, 2001]

*“The Mayors and chairmen of numerous city and suburban local authorities and organisations were present on the official platform, and the architect, Mr Llewellyn Stanley Piper, presented the*

commemorative gold key to the Minister.

*“The move to get a new post office for Avondale dates back to September 25, 1935, when Mr C H Speakman started a petition which was signed by 500 Avondale residents, pointing out that the building then in use, which was formerly an hotel, was not centrally situated, and that inconvenience was caused to business firms and residents. It was felt, in view of the development of the district, that a new building was necessary. The petition was sent to the then Postmaster-General, the Hon. F Jones, stating that a decision had been made to erect a modern building.”* [Auckland Star, 19 August 1938]

By now, nine years after amalgamation, Auckland City had received complaints from Avondale residents concerning lack of facilities, much the same situation has had brought down the earlier Borough Council. The Mayor, opening the new **Post Office**, took pains to have his staff provide research into the funding thus far provided for Avondale’s amenities, and gave a speech detailing the improvements provided to Avondale since 1927. [memos from the Town Clerk’s office, August 1938.]

*“Amalgamated with the city since September 1927, Avondale had continued to flourish. The length of streets was approximately 40 miles, and under the headings of capital works, relief works and general expenditure, including substantial maintenance, the total expenditure amounted to the large sum of £360,000. Of the capital works account, the amount was*

*£170,000, relief works £48,665 and maintenance £125,000.*

*“Mr Tait, who was Mayor of Avondale for four years prior to the merger in 1927, said the programme of construction on roads and footpaths carried out by the city council could not have been undertaken by a small local body. All the important thoroughfares of the district had been formed, kerbed and surfaced to the full width, and a substantial sum had been spent on footpath improvements.”* [Auckland Star, 19 August 1938]

Charles Collier first raised his suggestion for removal of the **Avondale Primary School** to reunite the two halves of the shopping centre in 1938. [Western Leader, 13/8/68]

## 1939

*“In 1900 Avondale had about 5 shops. By 1939 there were nearly 40. This increase reflected not just growth in the local population, but also Avondale’s importance as a shopping area for people in much of West Auckland.”* [Challenge of the Whau, p. 92]

W. John Tait becomes the first president of the Avondale Business Association (He was the developer of the Unity block). Tait was on the Avondale Roads Board and Borough Council prior to 1927, and was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mayor of Avondale 1923-26. He is thought by some sources to be the “Father of Avondale”, although this title rightly belongs to his predecessor, and fellow land agent, John Bollard.

**Hayward’s Picture Theatre Fire:** According to Mr Jan Grefstad,

manager and owner of the Hollywood Cinema, the Avondale Picture Theatre (Town Hall) fire was on 3 June 1939, and started in the managers office at the foot of stairs that led upstairs. Rudall Hayward, then in the process of filming the sound version of *Rewi's Last Stand* in the Waitakeres (released 1940), was editing the film in his wife's office. The film was on nitrate-based stock, highly inflammable. Mr Hayward is believed to have been smoking a cigar at the time, and this may have been the cause of the fire.

A small fire ensued, leading to the evacuation of the cinema on that Saturday night. The local fire brigade came quick enough to prevent too much damage and put the fire out. [E-mail to author from J Grefstad, 27/4/01]

Mr Eric Waterfield said that the cinemagoers had to evacuate from the top windows of the cinema, and jump onto the roof of Mrs. Margaret Whale's confectionery/dairy shop next door.

Mr Grefstad also noted, in his unpublished work *Picture Theatres of Auckland*, that Rudall Hayward recorded the music for *Rewi's Last Stand* in the Avondale Theatre due to the good acoustics there.

[from photo scrapbook accompanying Avondale Oral History, 1991]: (The) fire was started in the small room at the bottom of the stairs where a film screening was in progress. There was only one stairway which served as both entrance and exit so people upstairs were trapped. Carpet runners were ripped up and slung over the balcony and people made to slide down to the stalls.

Everyone managed to get out safely.

Mrs Hayward ran the theatre during the war years, 1939 to 1945. *During the 1939 -1945 Second World War Mrs Hayward, his first wife would go on stage and point out in the newsreels any local lads overseas at war.* [Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]

During the filming of *Rewi's Last Stand*, so Avondale lore has it, Rudall Hayward met Ramai, who was to be his second wife, married to him after World War II.

**Public toilets/ Plunket Office:** Earliest letter known from Avondale Businessmen's Association, to Town Clerk, regarding public toilet/Plunket offices deputation.

The Avondale branch of the Labour Party appealed to Council in a letter of 1 April 1937 for employment opportunities to be created in Avondale, and gave as an example a public toilet needed. Later, they sent a deputation to speak directly with Council. This was originally suggested for either Crayford St or Racecourse Parade [letter from City Engineer, 7/2/38], but was also deferred [letter from Town Clerk, 1/3/38].

On 28 June 1938, Council received a petition from 169 residents of Avondale, including signatures from Tait and other businessmen, for a "convenience for Ladies and Gentlemen of the Avondale district and the travelling public." However, there were still no funds available [letter from City Engineer, 25/7/38], and the project was deferred again to 1939/40 estimates round.

On 29 November 1939, the secretary of Avondale's Plunket Society branch wrote to the Town Clerk:

*"At a combined meeting of representatives from the Avondale branch of the Plunket Society, the Avondale Business-men's Association, Blockhouse Bay Improvement Society, Avondale South Women's Club, Avondale Women's Institute, Avondale Labour Party and Avondale Returned Servicemen's Association, held **Tuesday, November 28**, the urgent need for Plunket restrooms and public conveniences at Avondale was fully discussed and I was instructed to ask if the Council is prepared to help with this proposal and that a deputation be received from above mentioned bodies as soon as convenient."*

The deputation went ahead on 14 December. The ABA secretary, also secretary of this new Avondale Support Committee, advised Council that Tait was prepared to offer land on Rosebank Road in return for work on the toilet/Plunket rooms completed within a year.

**Avondale Bakery:** Sam Gibson had apparently bought the Avondale Bakery and the land on which it was situated once again (at the north end of Fearon's Buildings) by 1939, according to Jennifer Battersby. Battersby's bought the land from Gibson in 1947.

During the war years, 1942 to 1945, the bakery was taken over by the American forces so as to provide bread for the Army units

based in Avondale. [Conversation with Jennifer Battersby, 4/5/01]

Other businesses adjusted to serve the **American troops** based at the Avondale Racecourse and at the Hospital on the (future) College and Intermediate School grounds.

During the war, **Avondale's own Home Guard** was active, involved with training by the Whau Creek, and issued with gas masks. They reported any fires, injuries, and first-aid needs to the Mission Hall on St Jude's St. Thomas Myers served as an "EPS" warden, the equivalent of the ARP wardens in Britain.

*"**Gernhoefer's milkbar** – it was there during the war [54 Rosebank Road] serving American coffee!"* [Letter from Mr Ivan Whyte to author, 24/4/01]

By the mid 1950s, this dairy/confectioners was owned by Darrell W Upfold, and called Darrell's Milkbar. Quite a few folk remember his shop fondly.

*"Mr [PH] Martin took over the fish shop [at 1890 Great North Road, Excelsior Chambers. Martin had a dairy at No. 1892] during WW2, catering for the Army forces. Did a lot of takeaways."* [Conversation with Mr and Mrs Browne, 9/5/2001]

**Presbyterian Church Hall:** *"Owing to the necessity of providing more space for Sunday school and Youth work, a new Church hall was erected at the end of 1939, and opened on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940."*

*"A new Primary Department and five classrooms have been added to the hall."* [Our First Century,

centenary booklet for St Ninians Church, 1960].

Unfortunately, this hall was destroyed by fire during the time the Union Parish sold land to Mobil Oil for their new service station in 1988/9.

During WW2 – great concrete blocks were placed on the Whau Bridge, restricting traffic to one lane. The purpose was to “stop the enemy” (similar to Great Britain, where street signs were removed from towns and villages, in case the enemy invaded). The blocks were placed one on one lane at one end, the other lane at the other. The Avondale Home Guard practiced there. [Conversation with Mr Browne, 9/5/01]

## 1940

Avondale Hotel bought by Mr Albert E. Bailey, renamed **Avoncourt**.

*“Avon court is listed in the AA Hotel guide as “2027 Great North Road, Avondale, 30 Beds, B.B.” as Mr Bailey gave up the full board service in 1957. Up until it’s demolition in 1967, Avoncourt was the only hotel between Symonds Street and Henderson.”* [Western Leader, 18/8/65]

Mr Albert Bailey was involved with the Businessmen’s Association as Secretary at least, and in the late 1950s and mid 1960s was an Auckland City Councillor .

Avondale lore has it that a driver with the ABC (McCrae’s) buses, Tom Skelton, stayed at the Avoncourt Hotel and was found dead in his room. [Conversation with Mr and Mrs Browne, 9 May 2001]

## Public toilet / Plunket Office:

Letter to Town Clerk from City Engineer:

*“Mr Tait has kindly offered to donate to the [Plunket] society a site some 20 feet wide by 100 feet deep situate on the South side of Rosebank Road, some 3 chains East of its intersection with Great North Road, practically at the tram stop at the terminus.*

*“I understand that Mr Tait’s offer of the land is conditional upon the building being erected before the end of this year.”*

The project was approved by Council 28/6/1940, land transferred 24/9/1940.

## c. 1945

From just after World War I, the Avondale Returned Soldiers Club formed, and met together in the Public Hall. They were an off-shoot of the Auckland Returned Servicemen’s association, and only in 1944/45 did they decide to form their own association.

From around 1928 to the end of the 1930s, the only shop on Layard Street was Prince’s Shop, run by Charles Weston Prince (1860-1943) and his wife Amanda (1868-1936) (possibly known as Grandma Prince to the schoolchildren). This shop served the Avondale Primary School pupils, with virtually everything a kiddie could want, including the ubiquitous penny ice creams, erasers, pencils, paper etc.

The Avondale RSA bought the building by 1947, and raised funds for the conversion from a shop to a club by selling bricks with the



buyer's name inscribed (these are still to be seen on the Layard Street facade of the old building.) The RSA had earlier been given land there by either Henry Burton or W J Tait.

In the late 1940s or early 1950s a building which had formed part of an American hospital on the Domain in Grafton was bought by the Association, who rapidly found the old shop was not big enough to serve the growing membership. 19 members of the Association dismantled the Hall on the Domain site, and organised the cartage back to Avondale where it was erected alongside the old shop building. There, they rebuilt it, and it stood there until fire destroyed it on the night of 26 February 1958.

The Association did rebuild, however, and in the 1980s extended their premises to include the modern club rooms, bar area, lounge, dance floor and restaurant there at present. [Sources: *Challenge of the Whau*, p. 114; *1995 RSA Yearbook*]

### 1945-46

**Collier's Block** of seven shops built on west side of Great North Road.

*"Building his own block of seven shops was quite a gamble. [Charles Collier] remembers keeping a large packing case empty just in case he was not successful. 'I was going to hawk the stock around the neighbourhood and at least recover my money that way.'" [Western Leader, 13/8/68]*

*"This shop, let it be emphasized, had a warm place in the hearts of*

*many West Auckland residents and Mr Collier Snr had a reputation for stocking everything from a needle to a swingletree. His shop, at its zenith, was the only hardware shop from Karangahape Rd to Warkworth."* [Western Leader, 3/12/70]

### 1945-49

**Avondale branch of Auckland Citizens and Ratepayers** active. They write to Council about varied matters:

- Railway bridge railing safety and replacement
- Land subdivisions
- Drainage
- Suggested hospital in Avondale in a letter to Auckland Hospital Board and Council. Claimed to know of a suitable 22-acre site.

This group may have been a precursor to the later **Residents and Ratepayers groups** in Avondale (one in Waterview still flourished into the late 1940s), and the **Community Committees**.

### 1945-65

Period of boom for Avondale. *"After the war, things built up. There was a big influx of people to Avondale."*

The original Avondale Variety store was built by a Canadian who came to live in New Zealand after the war by the name of Wally Rydwanski. He entered Avondale Lore by being called by Avondale residents "Wally the Yank". [Conversation with Robbie Robinson, Dennis Carews, 7/3/01]

## 1945

**Auckland Cinemas Ltd:** On September 11 1945 in a letter to the Town Clerk Phil Hayward, Henry Hayward's son, wrote *"further to our letter of July 23rd last with regard to the continuance of the present arrangement in running the above Town Hall as a picture theatre we would like to change the name of the applicant from H.J. Hayward (deceased) to the above Company. (Auckland Cinemas Ltd). As a director of Auckland Cinemas Ltd I can inform you that the management has been in the hands of the company since it was formed many years ago but as the original arrangement was with H. J. Hayward it has always been held in this name."* [Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]

**Bank of New Zealand branch reopens:** 2 November – BNZ moves to 1840 Great North Road (soon at the north end of Greys Buildings). Hours of service there grew over the years from once weekly in the afternoon, to daily from 10 am to 3 pm. [Western Leader, 16/6/65]

## 1946

The Avondale Picture Theatre/Town Hall first became called **Grosvenor Avondale** on August 17 1946 in the Auckland Star. *"On 13th October 1947 a new company was formed called Grosvenor Theatre Ltd with a capital of \$2000 divided into 1000 shares of \$2. Shareholding was Auckland Cinemas Ltd with 500 shares and Rudall and Hilda (his first wife) Hayward with 250 shares each."*

[Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]

In 1946, plans were first proposed for a new purpose built **Community Centre** in Avondale. In 1948, the properties at 99 and 101 Rosebank Road were purchased by the City Council. [Report by Clinton Savage, Community Advisor, to Acting Community Development Officer, Auckland City, 21/9/88]

## 1947

**Battersby's** makes a final move, to the current location just north of the Fearon building. By now, *"the need for larger premises was obvious and a move was made to their present address. Progress necessitated alterations in 1964 – these were intended to accommodate all requirements for many years."* [Western Leader, 25/11/71]

## 1950s

*"In the early 1950s Steeles built a large factory in upper Rosebank road between Great North Rd and Layard Street. Local women welcomed the employment opportunities it provided."* [Challenge of the Whau, p. 74]

Actually, Steeles was involved with purchasing the land for their factory in the 1940's, buying it from John Tait.

In 1950s, Wingate St bus depot site now **Avondale Rental Car Co.** [M Butler report, Heritage Planning, Auckland City Council, 2001]

## 1950

From *Progress in Western Districts* article, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 May 1950:

*"In recent years at least State and private building have marched side by side in both Point Chevalier and Avondale, both of which have some large blocks of **Government homes** as well as smaller groups that were scattered on suitable land in various parts.*

*"Although Avondale is a particularly old settlement with its Irish origin still seen in many local place names, it is **still only one-sixth or one-fifth developed**. Large areas of open land still on the Rosebank Peninsula, in Avondale South and near Waterview, indeed it is only in **central Avondale** that most of the available land is so far taken up by buildings.*

*"Of the suburbs within city control, Avondale probably offers the biggest untapped potential for future progress. Its development is assured, mainly as a residential suburb, although zoning provides for a "burned clay" products areas to assure the uninterrupted progress of one of Auckland's main areas.*

### **Great Changes likely**

*"A major work already begun, construction of the city's **north-western highway**, cannot be without a bearing upon the progress of the western suburbs. Running approximately parallel with the existing highway, but set substantially to the north of the present route, the new road will tend to take through traffic away from Avondale proper, and also New Lynn. However, this*

*development is not thought likely to have an adverse effect. Rather it is expected to reduce road congestion and to permit the two districts to extend their growth as residential suburbs that are no longer remote."*

### **Pilkington Buildings, 1883 Great North Road.**

[From information supplied by email to the author from Mr. Bruce Pilkington, December 2001]

On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1950 George and Flo Pilkington of Epsom purchased the section at the above address and the following year built the first of two shops. The second shop was built in 1954.

In the first shop Flo established Avondale Drapery which she managed as a busy clothing shop with a staff of four. In 1955 George and Flo sold this business to the Glenie family who still trade around Auckland as **Gardner Fashions**. The Glenie family remained as tenants for thirty-nine years until 1994. The next tenant was the ANZ Bank and today this shop has **MacDonalds Appliances** [now **Avondale Appliances** as from 2002] as a tenant.

The second shop when built was immediately rented to **Arthur H. Nathan Ltd Home Appliances** and they remained as tenants for twenty-four years until 1978. Then this shop became a carpet shop, then a furniture shop and later Postbank. Today this shop contains the **Westforce Credit Union Bank** as a tenant.

Flo passed away in 1980 and George in 1987, and the buildings are now owned by their three sons Clive, Ross and Bruce. Therefore the Pilkington Family has now had

a continuous 53 year relationship with the Avondale Shopping Centre.

### 1951

Around this time, Avondale first **TAB** opens in Crayford Street, opposite the Primary School, possibly in Kneebones' old billiard saloon. Despite the proximity to a school, the Totalisator Agency Board receives no complaints.

**Greys Building** built. Watson's chemist moves in (Mr Watson died 1950) [*Western Leader*, 17/5/83]

In 1951, the Presbyterian Church officers *"donated a triangle of land in front of the Church to the City Council. This plot has been planted with trees and flowers, and on it a Memorial raised in honour of all in this district who gave their lives during both World Wars. This Memorial was unveiled by Sir John Alum, then Mayor of Auckland, assisted at the ceremony by ministers of several denominations."*

This is present-day **Memorial Park**, at the Roundabout, to where each Anzac Day a parade marches through Avondale Central, a remembrance service held, and then a parade back to the RSA in Layard Street.

### 1952

Letter from **Auckland Cinemas Ltd** to the Council, June 18 1952:

*We are enclosing balance sheets for the last two years from which you will see that it has been no goldmine. In fact this theatre presents difficulties in*

*management, and careful attention to details is essential in producing any profit at all.*

*The reasons for this are-*

- 1. The situation of the Hall half a mile away from the trams and the main township of Avondale.*
- 2. Sparsely populated area facing the Racecourse and with the brickworks on the left.*
- 3. Close proximity of opposition Delta New Lynn 1 mile away De Luxe Mt. Albert one and half miles away and on Tram line, The Ambassador Pt Chevalier two and half miles away and on bus route from Avondale. [from Picture Theatres of Auckland]*

### 1953

**Charles Funnell** opens his furnishing business in Avondale, **Avondale Furnishing and Home Appliance Centre**.

*"A few years ago Mr Funnell won a competition for the highest sale of Prestcold refrigerators in the country. The prize was a trip to Australia, where he investigated the television market. This was in 1958, before television made an impact on New Zealand."* [*Western Leader*, 17/3/65]

He had bought the business from Mrs Martin, who had had a second-hand furniture business there for some years.

**J Broadbent** starts a plumber's merchant business in Avondale, in Rosebank Road. [*Western Leader*, 24/2/65]

In the early 1950s, **Ray's Studios** starts up in Avondale.

Terrence Ray Waterfield (b. 1924) started out in the early 1950s selling Watkins products door to door in Avondale in the early 1950s – he was the top salesman in Watkins products in New Zealand. One day the leader of the band playing at the old Peter Pan ballroom suggested to Mr Waterfield that he try running the man's camera shop for three weeks while the owner took a holiday. So, for three weeks, Mr Waterfield sold cameras. He noticed that another man used the backroom of the camera shop to do portrait photography. Confident he could do better, Mr Waterfield was offered equipment including a tripod by the camera store owner on tick.

At the time, Mr Waterfield lived in New Lynn. He initially sold 50 appointments, this before he had any knowledge of professional photography. He approached Clifton Firth, a photographer in Queen Street, and proclaimed that "I will double your turnover if you take me on and show me all about photography."

Among his jobs with Mr Firth was to visit the Western Springs transit camp, where people waiting for state housing would wait for their homes. They also covered Westmere and Grey Lynn. From his time with Mr Firth, Mr Waterfield learned how to set lights and take portrait photos. Soon after, he left Mr Firth, and learned from his own experience from then on.

Rays Studios started in the film room of the Delta Theatre, leased from a Mr Popovic., in 1953. There, Mr Waterfield encouraged young mothers visiting the theatre to leave

their young children with him so that their pictures could be taken while their mothers enjoyed the movies. After 6 months, Mr Popovic came to Mr Waterfield and said that he'd found out renting the room out to Mr Waterfield was illegal.

So, Mr Waterfield shifted his young business to Avondale. Through a Mr Rushton, he acquired space in a narrow area next to J N Henderson's chemist shop – "6 feet wide, virtually just a passage", so Mr Waterfield told me. This was at 1996 Great North Road, the Allely Building (later the site of the first agency of the Bank of New South Wales in Avondale). He shared space with Dr. H Moody. (A noted athlete, Dr Moody stayed at the Avoncourt Hotel).

Mrs Waterfield came into the business after working for a photographer named Christopher Bead. She went to Dr Moody's surgery, but couldn't find her new boss. On going to the greengrocer's next door, she was told – "That's him, out there under the car on the curb." [Conversation with Mr and Mrs Waterfield, 21/7/2001]

## 1954

Before the North-Western Motorway, there were concerns raised in the community in 1954 over a **proposed traffic by-pass:**

*"It was mentioned that a public meeting was being held shortly dealing with a traffic by-pass, and that a move was afoot to endeavour to remove the school."*  
[Ron Oates, *Avondale Primary School 1870-1990*, 1990]

Stuart North opens his business in Avondale, **Avondale Paint & Papers.** [*Western Leader*, 24/3/65]

*“Now, we have made available to all Western Suburbs residents, Auckland’s largest selection of wallpaper. In what is now Suburban Auckland’s largest showroom, you can view many designs in wallpapers in unhurried comfort and ease.”* [Advertisement, *Western Leader*, 24/3/65]

Mr North had been in the paint and wallpaper business before opening the Avondale shop. As he tells it, a Mr David Fine, working in the ANZ bank Queen St suggested to Stuart North that he open a shop, and have one in a new block of shops then being built in Avondale.

There was nothing else quite like Avondale Paint & Papers Ltd in the whole of West Auckland – the only other store before Lynn mall in 1963 was Smith & Smiths beside the empty paddocks in New Lynn, who sold only to trade.

During the mid 1950s there was a recession, but Stuart North kept his shop going. One of his more famous promotional campaigns involved a family of three chimpanzees owned by a Mr Alan Horobin, arranged through Dulux Paints. Before the promotion, on Mr Horobin’s suggestion, the chimpanzees were walked down the main street of Avondale, while Mr North set to with hurling wallpaper rolls and bits and pieces around in the shop, creating a chaotic scene as if the chimpanzees had done it. Horobin came back, and with local children watching pretended to smack the chimps’ bottoms.

Prior to the promotion starting, a wild rumour went around and was

picked up by the *NZ Herald* that the shop had already been wrecked – for real – by chimpanzees. The elder, father chimp did painting in the store during the week-long promotion holding a brush with a hind leg, or in the mouth. Local children from the school were so keen to see the chimps that the teachers had trouble controlling them.

News of this travelled to the South Island, and even to England. A *Town & Around* show episode on TV, with Keith Bracey, had some of the chimps’ painting taken to Albert Park, where passers-by were asked what they thought. Most thought the work was by modern, human, artists. The story then received front page coverage by the *Herald*, and a Gordon Minninnick cartoon.

Mr North recalled that on the final night, with the crowds out on the footpath growing, they decided to move the artistic chimpanzee up onto the shop verandah. From there, the chimp spied a motorcycle, and stopped to take a look as the bike and rider motored down the road, the chimp never losing balance.

Stuart North ensured that there were a lot of such promotions at the store, although none achieved the notoriety of the chimpanzees. He would hold lessons in-store, teaching customers how to hang wallpaper and how to use paint. Consultants from Dulux Paints would give a series of talks at the Primary School’s assembly hall.

In 1955, Mr North founded the Avondale Art Group, which ran for 8 years. The idea for the group

came when he noticed he had extra space on the walls of his shop, and so approached people in the district to ask if they wanted to exhibit their pictures in his shop. These people then got to meet one another, and discovered a common interest. Eventually, the group had 80 members at its height, and Mr North was instrumental in starting up night classes at Avondale College for art – the beginners taught by Mr John Henderson (of Wiseman Bags, and later Spooners); Garth Tapper teaching advanced; and John Richards took life class.

After he returned to Avondale in 1963 from his overseas trip, he found the group had largely disappeared. But his interest in art, drawing and painting has not diminished. On retirement in 1978, he started to draw and paint for his own interest and pleasure, and now has an impressive private gallery of his own at his home. Also, he helped to found the Titirangi Painters group, who hold regular exhibitions of local work. [Conversation with Stuart North, 3 July 2001]

## 1955

**Avondale Florists Ltd** incorporated 11/3/1955. Shop in the Crayford Street-St Judes Block, northern end, later taken over by Morrison's funeral directors, Henderson, and closed c.1984 as Morrisons enlarged their Lincoln Road floral supplier. [Companies office record, via internet, 2001]

**Avondale Motors Ltd** (opposite Primary School), incorporated 31/3/1955. Moved to New Lynn early 1970s, finally removed as a

company 10/11/1998. [Companies office record, via internet, 2001]

From *Avondale Advance* article, 26/4/55:

*"From a cultural point of view Avondale is, without a doubt, the worst place in Auckland for its advancement or encouragement. In fact, it has nothing but a dilapidated building now used to screen pictures ... The **Businessmen's Association** and other organisations interested in the district should combine and not rest until the Council takes steps to correct the present untenable state of affairs."*

Regarding the then Avondale Picture Theatre, re-named Grosvenor, and now Hollywood.

In June, 1955, J Broadbent moves his business to Great North Rd (**Broadbent Hardware Ltd**). *"The object in his hardware business, he said, "is to cater for local tradesmen and handymen in the western suburbs."* [Western Leader, 24/2/1965]

From 1 October to 11 November 1955, the **Grosvenor Theatre** was closed for Council's renovations. During this period, the dome at the top was removed, as it was made of cast lead which had deteriorated and was found to be unsafe, and one of the first stainless steel urinals in Auckland was installed. [Conversation between the author and Mr Leatham, who had been a plumber's apprentice with Auckland City Council, March 2001]

*In 1955 the Auckland City Council as owners of the building spent about \$16,000 for renovations which included repainting the interior, repairs to the roof and gutters, improvements to the*

entrance and re-upholstering the seating. [Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]

In the "Avondale Advance", in November 1955 Brian Sommerville (Grosvenor Theatre manager) said "After being closed for six weeks it has reopened as a modern theatre and (with) a new name "Grosvenor Theatre". He said it was with some personal satisfaction he was able to reopen the doors and let the people of Avondale see something worthy of the district. No former patron of the theatre would recognise it for the same place. The ceilings have been painted to a sky effect and the walls are coloured gold. The new panoramic screen is able to be adjusted for CinemaScope - one plan for future improvements. New stage lights have been installed, the stall chairs have been upholstered and the theatre has been fitted with body carpets and new linoleum in the foyer. The front entrance has been done out in black and white tiles as an effective introduction to the improvements inside. There is a new office for the Manager and a new ticket office. [Jan Grefstad, *Picture Theatres of Auckland*]

## 1956

Construction was under way in January 1956 for the new **trolley-bus turning circle** (actually a half-circle) cut into Rosebank Road properties alongside the former tram terminus.

### **"Last Tramcar to Avondale Will Run Tonight.**

*The last tram to Avondale will run tonight and bus services will start tomorrow. The first day of the changeover coincides with the*

*heavy race traffic expected for the Avondale Jockey Club's summer meeting, so some official fingers will be crossed that all goes well.*

*"More than 5500 circulars have been sent out by the Auckland Transport Board to residents on the Avondale route giving them details of the new service. New signs are ready for the route. Today will be a day of final details." [NZ Herald, 15/1/1956]*

**Trams:** The trusty tram service was at its end as far as Auckland was concerned. Inflexibility of the tram compared to motor traffic was just one reason why the Tramways Corporation became the Transport Board, and later under the Auckland Regional Council.

**The North-Western Motorway** was opened along Rosebank Peninsula. [*Challenge of the Whau*, p. 61]

What was to become the WestpacTrust bank in the future first opened for business in Avondale on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1956 when one of the parent companies, the **Bank of New South Wales**, operated an agency to its New Lynn branch on 1996 Great North Road. The agency was open for three days a week in leased premises costing seventy pounds per year.

[E-mail from Pauline Porteous, Records and Archive Manager, WestpacTrust, 27/3/01]

## 1957

**Des Ferry** opens panel beating business in northern end of Pages Building, late 1957. He served as president of the Businessmens Association during his time. Ms.



Claude-Goldie recalls the enthusiasm of her father with regard to Avondale and the shopping centre. [Recollection of Liz Claude-Goldie, 2001]

In 1957, **Rays Studios** moved slightly north, to 1958 Great North Road, next to **Coyle's Hardware**. This was apparently the old shop used by Charles Hieatt in the 1920s – Mr and Mrs Waterfield both remarked on seeing old signs on the walls, advertising groceries. By now, the building which had housed the first billiard saloon and Lawrence Tierney's barbershop earlier in the century was owned by Burt Coyle, from who "you could get anything from a pin to an elephant", according to Mr Waterfield.

At that time, **Alan Ross** of **Avondale Radio Service** (there since just after World War II) moved out of no. 1958 to a new shop he built at the end of the Excelsior Chambers (later **Ross Radio and Television**, then **Laws Electrical**).

The darkroom at the rear was made up from car-cases. Once, Mr Waterfield recalled, the floorboards rotted and gave way beneath the carpet where a customer was standing – the lady slowly began to sink before they realised.

One of the promotional ideas used by the Waterfields came from an idea they had while on holiday at the Chateau, Tongariro. Mr Waterfield saw Styrofoam for the first time, and thought on how it looked so much like snow. Once home, the Waterfields acquired some Styrofoam, spread it around in the front window, interspersed

with some photos, and put up a sign in the window which told the shoppers of Avondale: "This snow has been brought in specially from the Chateau – keep your hands away from the glass, as you will get very cold." The "refrigerated window" had quite a few intrigued – the Waterfields recall the sight of inquisitive folk tentatively touching the glass of the window, then turning to those nearby and declaring, "It is cold, you know!" [Conversation with Mr and Mrs Waterfield, 21/7/2001]

## 1958

Charles Collier is now President of Businessmen's Association. He once again made a suggestion that **Avondale Primary School** be replaced with a modern shopping centre. [Western Leader, 13/8/68]

St Judes St telephone exchange built. [Challenge of the Whau]

## 1959

**Marina Beauty Salon** opened in Avondale, by Mrs L G Alison. All her shopping is done in Avondale. "Why should I travel into the city or other areas when I can buy what I want in Avondale?" she says. [Western Leader, 7/4/65]

*Interflora has high hopes of penetrating the Iron Curtain in the near future. This news comes forward when Mr Hec. McLiver of **Avondale Florists Ltd**, who is chairman of the Auckland Province of Interflora's Pacific Unit, said the subject had been discussed with Mr. G M Rodianov, the Soviet Charge d'Affaires in Wellington.*

*“Mr Rodianov did not know anything about Interflora,” explained Mr McLiver. “He was very interested and said he would take it up with Mr Krushchev.” [New Lynn “Sportsman”, 22/7/59]*

In 1959, Auckland City purchased the land for the new library (built 1973) and Rosebank Community House (93-97 Rosebank Road). This ended private business and shops on this land, after nearly 60 years. The house at 97 Rosebank Road was added to Council’s rental stock, until 1979. [Report by Clinton Savage, Community Advisor, to Acting Community Development Officer, Auckland City, 21/9/88]